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Report on the expert meeting on an information hub for information on the results of the activities referred to in decision 1/CP.16, paragraph 70, and results-based payments

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Note by the secretariat

Summary

An expert meeting on an information hub for information on results of the activities referred to in decision 1/CP.16, paragraph 70, and results-based payments was held in Bonn, Germany, on 2 and 3 September 2014. Party representatives gave presentations, describing their experience with the set-up of national information portals related to the activities referred to in decision 1/CP.16, paragraph 70, and making proposals regarding the information hub. The presentations that followed, made by experts from intergovernmental organizations and the REDD+ Partnership, focused on sharing experiences with data reporting and portal management at the international level and presenting potential options for the design of the information hub. In plenary discussions, experts engaged in a detailed technical consideration related to the design and functionalities of the information hub, ways to enter information in the information hub and options related to entries of corresponding results-based payments. Experts concluded that the information hub should be flexible enough to evolve in case Parties want to revisit some options or functions after gaining more experience with the implementation of results-based actions related to the activities referred to in decision 1/CP.16, paragraph 70. The Subsidiary Body for Implementation may wish to take note of the outcome of these discussions at its forty-first session.

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I. Introduction

A. Background and mandate

1. By decision 9/CP.19, on the work programme on results-based finance to progress the full implementation of the activities referred to in decision 1/CP.16, paragraph 70 (hereinafter referred to as "REDD-plus activities"),[1] the Conference of the Parties (COP) established an information hub on the web platform on the UNFCCC website[2] (hereinafter referred to as the REDD web platform) as a means of publishing information on the results of REDD-plus activities and corresponding results-based payments. The COP noted that the information hub aims to increase transparency of information on results-based actions, on the corresponding payments, as well as information related to the elements referred to in decision 1/CP.16, paragraph 71, without creating additional requirements for developing country Parties.[3]

2. The COP also decided that the information hub will contain:[4]

(a) The results for each relevant period expressed in tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent per year and a link to the technical report referred to in decision 14/CP.19, paragraph 14;

(b) The assessed forest reference emission level(s) and/or forest reference level(s) expressed in tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent per year and a link to the final report of the technical assessment team referred to in decision 13/CP.19, paragraph 18;

(c) The summary of information on how all of the safeguards referred to in decision 1/CP.16, appendix I, are being addressed and respected, as referred to in decisions 12/CP.19 and 12/CP.17, chapter I;

(d) A link to the national strategy or action plan as referred to in decision 1/CP.16, paragraph 71(a), as appropriate;

(e) Information on the national forest monitoring system, as provided in the technical annex referred to in decision 14/CP.19;

(f) Information on each of the results, including the quantity of results for which payments were received, expressed in tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent per year, and the entity paying for results.

3. The COP agreed that the information on results-based payments is to be inserted on the information hub in consultation with the developing country Party concerned, taking into full account decision 10/CP.19, paragraph 2.[5]

4. Furthermore, the COP requested the secretariat to organize an expert meeting on the matters referred to in paragraphs 2 and 3 above, as well as on the format for the insertion of the information referred to in paragraph 2(f) above, and to prepare a report on that expert

[1] In decision 1/CP.16, paragraph 70, the Conference of the Parties encouraged developing country Parties to contribute to mitigation actions in the forest sector by undertaking the following activities: reducing emissions from deforestation; reducing emissions from forest degradation, conservation of forest carbon stocks; sustainable management of forests; and enhancement of forest carbon stocks.

[2] <http://unfccc.int/redd>.

[3] Decision 9/CP.19, paragraphs 9 and 10.

[4] Decision 9/CP.19, paragraphs 11 and 12.

[5] Decision 9/CP.19, paragraph 13.

meeting for consideration by the Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI) at its forty-first session.[6]

B. Possible action by the Subsidiary Body for Implementation

5. SBI 41 may wish to take note of this document as part of its consideration of its agenda sub-item 19(a). This would enable the secretariat to establish the information hub at the soonest possible time.

II. Proceedings

6. The expert meeting on an information hub for information on results of the activities referred to in decision 1/CP.16, paragraph 70, and results-based payments took place at the United Nations Campus in Bonn, Germany, on 2 and 3 September 2014. It was chaired by the Chair of the SBI, Mr. Amena Yauvoli (Fiji). The chair introduced the mandate and objectives of the expert meeting and presented the approach to the work. Financial support for the workshop was provided by the Government of Norway.

7. In total, 46 experts participated in the expert meeting, representing 30 Parties not included in Annex I to the Convention, 7 Parties included in Annex I to the Convention, and including three experts from intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), two experts from nongovernmental organizations and two experts representing the REDD+ Partnership. The IGOs represented were the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Collaborative Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries and the World Bank.

8. The expert meeting was organized in three sessions. The objective of the meeting was to allow experts:

(a) To identify and discuss in-depth the technical considerations for the set-up of an information hub and to propose ways to address and/or take on these technical considerations to ensure the efficient and effective operation of the hub;

(b) To propose format options for the insertion of the information provided by Parties and relevant entities;

(c) To recommend ways to improve and further develop the web platform to ensure that the information made available on the hub is transparent and easily accessible.

9. For each of the three sessions, the chair of the meeting provided some background information and posed guiding questions. The questions posed were:

(a) For session I (setting the scene): what are some lessons learned from the implementation of national REDD-plus portals that could inform the design of the information hub?

(b) For session II (the big picture – general look and feel):

(i) What can be learned from the international reporting of forest-related data and the design of related information portals with regard to making the information available in a simple, transparent and easily accessible manner?

(ii) What should be the entry point for the information hub, and the relationship between the information hub and the REDD web platform?

[6] Decision 9/CP.19, paragraph 15.

(iii) How can the interaction between the secretariat and developing country Parties in the matter of insertion of information on results-based payments be structured efficiently?

(c) For session III (detailed technical considerations):

(i) In order to differentiate between the different sources of payments for one result, should there be a possibility to voluntarily specify information for each payment received, such as information on the time, geographic location, project number, web link, or other additional information?

(ii) How to best ensure that links with any other relevant future system developed under the Convention will be possible (decision 9/CP.19, para. 17)?

10. The agenda and a background note for the expert meeting, a webcast recording of the meeting and the presentations by representatives of Parties and the intergovernmental organizations are available on the UNFCCC website.[7]

III. Summary of presentations

11. Four Parties gave presentations, describing their experience with the set-up of national information portals for REDD-plus and making proposals regarding the information hub. The secretariat gave a presentation on the potential options for the design of the information hub. Three other presentations, made by experts from intergovernmental organizations and the REDD+ Partnership, followed, in which the experience of these organizations with data reporting and portal management at the international level was shared.

12. The first presentation was given by an expert from Indonesia on the country's experience with its Portfolio Management of REDD-plus system (PORTREDD). The programme registry and management system of PORTREDD comprises three distinct components: an open system for registering REDD-plus projects and programmes in Indonesia, recording of compliance with safeguards for reporting through the country's safeguards information system, and the program management system for the tracking, monitoring and reporting of programmes. PORTREDD is currently in the design phase. The expert emphasized the importance of simplicity and user-friendliness, in particular for increasing the participation of stakeholders. Guiding principles for the development of PORTREDD include, among others, transparency, accountability, consistency and comprehensiveness.

13. An expert from Paraguay presented the country's approaches to sharing information related to REDD-plus activities. The national system for information related to REDD-plus encompasses different platforms, notably the Environmental Information System (SIAM) and the National Forest Information System (SNIF). Paraguay's aim is to integrate these different platforms using one access point for all information related to REDD-plus activities. The national forest monitoring system module will link with the SNIF and the SIAM. Building such an integrated information system in a way that ensures transparency requires significant coordination among government agencies, as well as coordination between the government and the civil society.

14. An expert from Brazil called attention to six basic principles that should apply to the information hub and the related database: the database should be open-format, interoperable and simple, while the information layout should be user-friendly, accessible and transparent. The presentation provided two examples of the design of the information hub.

[7] <http://unfccc.int/8458>.

The expert also highlighted the importance of a search engine for searching by country and region, and of a sorting engine for classifying data according to the user's preferences. It was suggested that a link to further information could be displayed if deemed appropriate by the developing country Party. Finally, the expert presented an example of a simplified form for providing information to the information hub.

15. An expert from the United States of America presented on lessons learned from the State of California's experience with offset project registries and from the Partnership for Market Readiness, a global partnership of 31 developed and developing countries providing funding and technical assistance for the collective innovation and piloting of market-based instruments for greenhouse gas emissions reductions. The expert explained that documentation on programmes, results and any information submitted should be recorded transparently, publicly and accurately. She also provided detailed ideas on how to translate the provisions contained in decision 9/CP.19 into a proposal for the information hub. In essence, the information hub should be simple, easy to manage, should not place an additional burden on Parties, and should contain information that is accurate, transparent and useful.

16. A representative of the secretariat presented options for the design of the information hub in line with decision 9/CP.19, including options on the technical set-up, display of information and the consultation process with the developing country concerned. The representative noted that additional information, such as the name of the submitting country and the submission year or date, would probably be needed for each result in the information hub in order to differentiate between entries. He concluded that using similar technology and design for the information hub and the upgrade of the REDD web platform would lead to efficiency gains.

17. In her presentation, the representative of the World Bank focused on data management and reporting for the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility. She explained that countries expect data management systems to support the implementation of their REDD-plus strategy and to ensure consistency of REDD-plus activities carried out at different scales. Data management systems are also expected to promote transparency and equity by providing access to information to different categories of stakeholders. The expert added that countries' needs, circumstances and capacity will determine the approach to data management and emission reduction registries used to comply with the requirements of the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility.

18. The FAO expert provided input, based on the lessons learned from country reporting, to the "global forest resources assessments". The expert highlighted several challenges that these assessments faced, including a lack of continuity due to changes in national correspondents, limited training resources and generally a limited capacity of countries to respond to the high demand for additional information. According to the expert, some of these challenges could also be encountered in the use of the information hub. He also mentioned the challenges, faced by some countries, posed by software bugs and online connection difficulties. Issues related to data quality include unknown precision or time series inconsistencies, suggesting that data checking and cleaning is crucial. The expert finally highlighted the importance of targeted capacity-building investments and of the role of partnerships in reducing the reporting burden, and underlined that automation and review are critical and need substantial resources.

19. The last presentation was given by an expert from the REDD+ Partnership on experiences with the creation and maintenance of the voluntary REDD+ database (VRD). The VRD contains data voluntarily reported by member countries and institutions in a questionnaire sent annually to VRD focal points. Challenges related to data collection include identification and availability of VRD focal points, difficulties in data sourcing, non-harmonized understanding of the categories within the VRD and difficulties in using a

standard data collection format containing mandatory and non-mandatory fields for each entry. Moreover, although online reporting is efficient, difficulties in internet access suggest that a flexible process is required. Working to resolve discrepancies between recipients' and funders' reports was identified as an important activity for the VRD. The expert concluded that quality assurance processes and dedicated resources for administering the platform are essential.

IV. Summary of the plenary discussions

20. During sessions II and III of the expert meeting, the discussion was guided by options and questions posed by the chair of the meeting and presented to experts in a background note[8] (see para. 9 above). The experts engaged in plenary discussions, addressing and elaborating on technical and design questions in the consideration of the design of the information hub.

A. Design and functionalities of the information hub

21. The experts recalled the importance of the mandate for the information hub.[9] They also recalled that the information hub aims to increase the transparency of REDD-plus results-based actions, corresponding payments and information related to the elements referred to in decision 1/CP.16, paragraph 71. They emphasized that it is very important that the information hub be practical, user-friendly, simple and transparent in order to become a comprehensive source of information without creating additional requirements for developing country Parties.

22. Regarding the design of the information hub, experts shared the view that consolidating proposals from the presentations given by experts from Parties while maintaining the unique features of each proposal would form a good basis for a solid and useful information hub. The landing page should display a list of results with the option to access more detailed information, for example on separate pages dedicated to countries. Experts further emphasized that the information hub has to be designed in a way that avoids any double reporting.

23. The rich discussions among experts contributed a number of ideas on the design and functionality of the information hub. Among the ideas were making the data freely downloadable for use by different stakeholders and using an open-format database for the management of data, which would allow for the replication of data in other areas of the website. Many experts were also favourable to the adding of visualizations like graphics and figures to the information hub, if possible. Some experts suggested that the main page of the information hub should feature a search engine for countries and regions, as well as the option to sort the information.

24. All experts requested the secretariat to explore ways to make the REDD web platform more visible and easier to find on the UNFCCC website, and to establish several entry points for the information hub in different locations of the UNFCCC website. They emphasized that efficiency gains and improvements, especially improved user-friendliness, are always welcome. It was further suggested to consistently use the term "REDD-plus web platform" on the UNFCCC website.

[8] <http://unfccc.int/files/methods/redd/application/pdf/info_hub_background_note-rev.pdf>.

[9] Decision 9/CP.19, paragraphs 9 and 10.

B. Entering information in the information hub

25. It was pointed out that the information referred to in decision 9/CP.19, paragraph 11, will be included in the information hub by the secretariat once all of the information is available through the appropriate channels under the Convention. The basis for each entry row would be an assessed forest reference emission level or forest reference level and the corresponding results, analysed in accordance with decision 14/CP.19.

26. Information on the quantity of results for which payments were received and the entity paying for results would have to be provided separately. Logically, one result entry could correspond to several entries for payments from several entities. Some experts were of the view that it would be especially useful to display the amount of emission reductions still available for payments, so as to allow donors to easily identify emission reductions that are seeking results-based payments.

27. It is possible to anticipate that in the future the information on the elements referred to in decision 9/CP.19, paragraph 11(c–e), on the summary of information on how all of the safeguards referred to in decision 1/CP.16, appendix I, are being addressed and respected, on the national strategy or action plan, and on the information on the national forest monitoring system could be updated at some point. Therefore, the question was posed whether the corresponding information in the information hub should refer to the most recent information provided or that provided for the relevant period of the results. Experts concluded that for the time being it would be left to the developing country Party to indicate which documents should be displayed in the information hub.

28. Experts recalled that information on results-based payments provided by sources other than the developing country Party concerned should only be inserted upon consultation with the developing country Party, as agreed in decision 9/CP.19, paragraph 13, and that it would be useful to display the corresponding contact information of the developing country Party in the information hub, as appropriate. Technically the consultation could be achieved in an e-mail conversation or through a system in which each entry of a results-based payment has to be approved by the developing country Party concerned through a secured account before it becomes visible on the information hub.

C. Technical considerations related to entries of results-based payments

29. Experts discussed whether the results for each relevant period should be annualized when entering the results in the information hub, or whether the results should cover the full crediting period, with corresponding results-based payments attributed to the year in which they were received. Decision 9/CP.19, paragraph 11(a), refers to the results for each relevant period, and the experts were of the view that it should be left to each developing country Party to decide on the relevant period.

30. Another point of discussion was whether information on the status of emission reductions should be included in the information hub, with options being, for example, active, paid for, available for payment, or cancelled. It was cautioned that the meaning of many of the terms could change according to the context, and that therefore it would be better to avoid their use in the context of the information hub, with the exception of those used to denote whether the achieved emission reductions are seeking results-based payments.

D. Consideration of options related to additional information

31. Experts discussed the possibility of adding additional information to the information hub on a voluntary basis. There was a diversity of views on what kind of additional information could be useful. Examples include a link to the document containing the payment agreement or contract, the numerical coding of results, information on the entity receiving the payments, information on whether the approach is national or subnational, additional details on the geographic location, and more information on any additional certification of the activities. Experts discussed how to find a balance between simplicity and transparency, and agreed to leave the decision to the developing country Party providing the information. In order to keep the information hub simple and avoid an unmanageable increase of information fields, it was agreed that such information should be displayed on a separate page dedicated to the developing country providing the information.

32. Experts also discussed the question of whether the information hub should contain only results-based actions or should also contain information on activities in the earlier phases of REDD-plus. Experts noted that there is already a space for this information on readiness activities on the REDD web platform, which was initially set up for this purpose under a COP mandate,[10] and on which the information hub will also be located. It was also noted that the COP reaffirmed[11] that the progression of developing country Parties towards results-based actions occurs in the context of the provision of adequate and predictable support for all phases of REDD-plus activities and actions.

33. Some experts suggested that the information from the voluntary REDD-plus database of the interim REDD+ Partnership should not be lost in case the Partnership ceases to exist, and that ways could be explored to provide a link on the REDD web platform to the information in the voluntary REDD-plus database, or to make the information available as a simple spreadsheet for download via the REDD web platform.

E. Future improvement of the information hub

34. Finally, several experts emphasized that the information hub does not need to be perfect from the beginning, but that it should be flexible enough to evolve in case Parties want to revisit some options or functions after gaining more experience with the implementation of results-based REDD-plus actions. This would also apply to the possibility of linking results in the information hub to the same results reflected on any other relevant future system that may be developed under the Convention.[12]

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[10] Decision 2/CP.13.

[11] Decision 9/CP.19.

[12] Decision 9/CP.19, paragraph 17.